

WHAT WE HOPE TO SEE IN THE
***GREAT LAKES PROTECTION
ACT***

**CONNECTING PEOPLE TO
THE GREAT LAKES**

Great Lakes Protection Act
Alliance Backgrounder Series

Canadian Environmental Law
Association, Ecojustice, Ducks
Unlimited Canada, Environmental
Defence, Great Lakes United, and
Sierra Club Ontario

***How can people be better
connected to the Great Lakes?***

There is enormous potential for Ontarians to enjoy and protect the Great Lakes through outreach programs supported by the province, grants and incentive programs for stewardship and restoration, and through multi-stakeholder governance structures enabled in the Great Lakes Protection Act. This document describes successful programs that have helped to connect people to water, and seeks to elaborate on the following, from the Great Lakes Protection Act Alliance's [Statement of Expectations](#)ⁱ:

The Act should strive to get people, business, and government involved in celebrating, protecting and restoring these freshwater resources and the broader ecosystems they sustain.

Engage citizens and support
vibrant waterfront communities
and economies:

- Engage and connect all Great Lakes basin residents to the lakes;
- Make Ontarians proud to live beside the Great Lakes by helping communities celebrate, protect and restore their waterfronts and watersheds;
- Provide tools and incentives to engage citizens, volunteers, and workers in restoring and caring for their shorelines, such as Adopt-a-Beach in the US, or shoreline stewardship councils;
- Support an action agenda to create conservation jobs to boost the economy;
- Create meaningful economic opportunities for our smaller coastal communities by restoring a healthy native fish community;
- Secure Ontario's agricultural economy through measures that protect the quantity and quality of water which it relies on;
- Promote Great Lakes' heritage, beaches, and coastlines as world-class and local tourism destinations to visitors like bird watchers, recreational fishermen and trail users.



Models:

The Great Lakes would benefit by a number of approaches being employed to connect people to the lakes, such as:

- Increase people's sense of place in relation to the Great Lakesⁱⁱ by involving people in local watershed based decision-making. This is discussed in our Integrated Watershed Management and Governance backgrounders;
- Direct provincial program granting and establishing a Great Lakes granting body;
- Use Ontario's Stewardship Councils, local municipal rural water quality program committees, and watershed based community groups where they exist to administer and fund restoration and stewardship activities;
- Engage citizens groups and non-traditional environmental allies in program delivery. This will leverage the funding available for preservation and protection, deliver good programs, and increase the creativity that goes into problem solving;
- Work across Ministries to embed Great Lakes protection and promotion in non-environmental programs, such as tourism.

Granting:

The province should provide direct grants to initiatives which will address clearly identified targets and outcomes in the Great Lakes Protection Act or Plan. Additionally, a Great Lakes granting body similar to the

[Greenbelt Foundation](#)ⁱⁱⁱ can administer other grants and require grant applicants to leverage with funding from other sources. The [Lake Simcoe Clean Up Fund](#)^{iv} is another good example.

The charitable sector has developed excellent programs, and knows how to leverage funding from other sources. Supporting charities to connect people with the Great lakes is an efficient way to get results.



RECOMMENDED PROGRAMS

Below is a summary of successful programs that connect people to water which have been identified as useful for the Great Lakes.

→ STEWARDSHIP,
RESTORATION AND
ECONOMIC IMPACTS:
LEARNING FROM THE U.S.

The US government has promised approximately \$3 billion to fund the [Great Lakes Restoration Initiative](#)^v over the next three years. Their focus is on stewardship and getting shovels in the ground, and good thing; though budgets are being cut, the

Americans have implemented stewardship and restoration programs that made a difference to the Great Lakes' ecosystem. In tough economic times, restoration actions that are focused on targets that are informed by science and monitoring must be given priority along with efficient, effective and accountable program administration. Monitoring and evaluation should be required to measure effectiveness of projects and allow for adaptation.

Dollars spent on restoration have positive economic impacts on tourism and recreation communities^{vi}. A [Brookings Institute study](#)^{vii} projected a \$2 economic impact for every dollar spent on the Great Lakes. Shoreline restoration programs are demonstrated to [increase the value](#) of nearby real estate, and enrich the local economy. (Credit Valley Conservation published a similar report.^{viii})

Some American states coordinated and planned stewardship activities with all of the organizations able to conduct restoration and stewardship work. Freshwater Futures, a charity, has helped build some organizations' capacity, enabling them to apply for state funding. This capacity-building activity is one that an Ontario provincial granting organization could coordinate. Stewardship Councils and other locally based stakeholder groups could coordinate stewardship activity, similar to the experience described here.

→RESEARCH AND STEWARDSHIP PARTNERSHIPS

Foster opportunities for citizens groups, municipalities, "friends of" groups, universities and colleges to research and monitor, or restore special places along the Great Lakes and in our watersheds. Establish a monitoring protocol and invite groups to apply for mini grants to conduct the research and do the local reporting.

Some good examples:

[Watershed Report Cards](#)^{ix} are used by several of Ontario's Conservation Authorities as a means of collecting and reporting on surface water quality, forest conditions and groundwater, as well as providing a summary of key watershed features and actions being undertaken locally.

These reports provide people and agencies with easily understood environmental information. Numerous local "[friends of" groups](#)^x have rallied around them including the [Upper Avon River Conservation Club](#) which uses the watershed plan and watershed report cards to guide their conservation activities.

[The Hamilton-Halton Watershed Stewardship Program](#)^{xi} grew out of the Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan and has been in existence since 1994 to provide landowners with the information, technical and financial assistance they need to become responsible and caring stewards of land and

water. It is a partnership of Hamilton Conservation Authority and Conservation Halton with the Bay Area Restoration Council.

[ReWilding Keswick Creeks](#)^{xii} uses community generated design opportunities to plan the rehabilitation of an urbanized watershed.

Georgina Island First Nation youth conducted a littoral zone study, mapped species at risk and aquatic habitat and conducted shoreline evaluations and restoration projects. They created a Fish Habitat Management Plan and they use the information gathered in developing their (draft) land use plan and shoreline development approval processes. They educate the local contractors about the First Nations environment and use social marketing tactics as enforcement measures. They received funding from and partnered with the Anishinabek Ontario Fisheries Resource Centre, Environment Canada's Aboriginal Funds for Species at Risk and the Ministry of Natural Resources Stewardship Rangers Program among other organizations. Contact Kerry-Ann Charles for more information ginishgirl@yahoo.ca.

Also see:

[Georgian Bay Forever's Adopt-a-Wetland](#)^{xiii}

[US Adopt-a-Beach](#)^{xiv}

[Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society \(CPAWS\) Adopt-a-Beach](#)^{xv}



→ AGRICULTURAL

Farmers' livelihoods and the communities they belong to will be supported through measures that protect the quantity and quality of water.

Given the heavy impacts of agriculture on water quality and quantity, investing in agricultural stewardship programs is perhaps the most important stewardship focus for the Great Lakes Protection Act.

There are already many initiatives being undertaken in Ontario to address farm and rural water quality through Ontario Soil and Crop Association and Farm Organizations in the Canada [Ontario Farm Stewardship Program](#)^{xvi} and municipal rural water quality programs^{xvii} that could be enhanced through the Great Lakes Protection Act.

[Alternative Land Use Services](#)^{xviii} (ALUS) pays landowners not to disturb wetlands. Each acre of wetland is assigned a dollar value and the landowner is then compensated accordingly on a yearly basis. This means that wetlands are not being grazed or

planted because they are more of a valuable investment left natural and protected.

[Cows and Fish!](#)^{xi} Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Societies connect ranchers and farmers with individuals who are able to instill the values that functioning riparian areas and wetlands are an essential way to ensure the healthy and stable lands and ecosystems. This program is very highly recommended.

→PLACE-BASED INFORMATION SHARING

Creating and sharing resources for local groups is an efficient way to involve non-experts in local restoration activities. The following come highly recommended.

[Freshwater Futures](#)^{xx} provides a Restoration Toolkit which includes a resource manual to help citizens participate in and plan restoration projects of all types.

[The Federation of Ontario Cottagers Association's Dock Talk](#) program comes as a kit that provides valuable training aids, multi-media tools, materials, and expertise to help local cottager associations deliver practical information on improving the health of waterfront environments.

The Islands Trust, (local government responsible for the Gulf Islands in BC), partnered with UBC and Green Shores to map island ecosystems, and is sharing the maps with communities to improve local land use planning decisions. Contact Chris Jackson

for more information
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[The Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation](#)^{xxi} creates resources and shares them with the volunteer groups and municipalities who do the work to improve the coastal ecosystem.

[Conservation Authorities](#)^{xxii} connect people (residents and businesses) to the needs of their Great Lake shorelines through targeted newsletters like Credit Valley Conservation's "[Living by the Lake](#)" newsletters^{xxiii}. Other Conservation Authorities have undertaken [Great Lake Shoreline Stewardship Guides](#)^{xxiv}

[Waterlution](#)^{xxv} engages individuals, organizations and communities in developing inclusive, sustainable ways to manage water. They foster a network of water professionals and learners, and create workshops based on local content and needs.

→ EXPLORATION AND TOURISM

Helping people access to shorelines and green spaces is one of the best ways to link recreation, tourism, health, and environmental awareness. Programs with multiple benefits help foster cooperation and collaboration between community groups, departments, municipalities, and levels of government.



The [Blue Flag](#)^{xxvi} is a well known, prestigious award that recognizes those beaches and marinas that have achieved international standards in water quality,

environmental management, environmental education, and safety and services. The program helps to break down silos between administrative areas to work together towards better water and environmental quality at beaches and marinas.

[The Ontario Waterfront Trail](#)^{xxvii} has been an instrumental part of Lake Ontario's regeneration.

[The Path of the Chippewas](#)^{xxviii} is a successful First Nations tourism project on Georgina Island, Lake Simcoe, Ontario.

[Ontario Nature](#)^{xxix} member groups engage in activities such as environmental restoration and species counts. Tap into the potential of these groups!

For more information please contact:

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ⁱ Great Lakes Protection Act Alliance, *What we hope to see in the Great Lakes Protection Act, Statement of Expectations and Legislative Drafting Notes* (2012). Accessed at: <http://environmentaldefence.ca/sites/default/files/pdf/GLPA%20ENGO%20statement%20and%20drafting%20notes%20for%20opress%20release%20Mr%2023%202012.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Pollution Probe, *A New Approach to Water Management in Canada – Vision and Strategy*, (March 2008) p. 6.

ⁱⁱⁱ Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation. <http://greenbelt.ca/grants>

^{iv} Lake Simcoe Clean Up Fund. http://www.ec.gc.ca/doc/eau-water/simcoe_e.html

^v Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. <http://greatlakesrestoration.us/>

^{vi} Healthy Lakes.org. *\$50 billion benefit hinge on restoration of Great Lakes* (2007). Accessed at: <http://healthylakes.org/reports/50-billion-in-economic-benefit-hinge-on-restoration-of-great-lakes/>

^{vii} Brookings Institute, *Healthy Waters, Strong Economy*, (2007). Accessed at: http://healthylakes.org/site_upload/upload/GrtLakesCostBenefit.pdf

Healing Our Waters, Great Lakes Coalition. *America's North coast: A cost-benefit analysis of a program to protect and restore the Great Lakes* (2007). Accessed at:

http://healthylakes.org/site_upload/upload/America_s_North_Coast_Report_07.pdf

^{viii} Credit Valley Conservation, *Property Value Appreciation: Impacts of Natural Features* (2009). Accessed at: http://www.creditvalleyca.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/CVC-NatFeatRpt-Mar31_09.pdf

^{ix} Conservation Ontario's Watershed Report Cards

http://www.conservationontario.ca/watershed_monitoring/index.html

^x Friends of Groups examples:

http://www.thamesriver.on.ca/Watershed_Projects/watershed_projects.htm

^{xi} Hamilton-Halton Watershed Stewardship Program

http://www.protectingwater.ca/our_watersheds.cfm?smocid=1393

^{xii} ReWilding Keswick Creeks.

http://www.rewilding.ca/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=24&Itemid=244

^{xiii} Georgian Bay Forever Adopt-a-Wetland program.

<http://georgianbayforever.org/wetlands>

^{xiv} US Adopt-a-Beach program. <http://www.greatlakes.org/adoptabeach>

^{xv} Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society Adopt-a-Beach program.

<http://cpawnsnl.org/campaigns/adopt-a-beach>

^{xvi} Ontario Farm Stewardship Program

http://www.ontariosoilcrop.org/en/programs/canada_ontario_farm_stewardship_program_cofsp.htm

^{xvii} Ontario municipal rural water quality programs <http://www.cleanwaterprogram.ca/>

^{xviii} Alternative Land Use Service. <http://alus.ca/>

^{xix} Cows and Fish! <http://www.cowsandfish.org/>

^{xx} Fresh Water Futures, *Restoration Toolkit*. Accessed at:

<http://www.freshwaterfuture.org/resources/great-lakes-restoration-toolkit.html>

^{xxi} The Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation.

<http://lakehuron.ca/index.php?page=coastal-processes>

^{xxii} Conservation Authorities and the Great Lakes

http://www.conservationontario.ca/news/CO_Great_Lakes_2009_Ebulletin.htm

^{xxiii} Credit Valley Conservation's Living by the Lake newsletter.

<http://www.creditvalleyca.ca/watershed-science/living-by-the-lake/>

^{xxiv} Lakehead Region Conservation Authority Stewardship Guide. Accessed at:

<http://www.lakeheadca.com/graphics/StewardshipGuideforLakeSuperior.pdf>

^{xxv} Waterlution. <http://www.waterlution.org/>

^{xxvi} Blue Flag. www.BlueFlag.ca

^{xxvii} Ontario Waterfront Trail. <http://www.waterfronttrail.org/>

^{xxviii} Path of the Chippewas' Nanabush Trails. <http://www.nanabushtrails.com/>

^{xxix} Federation of Ontario Naturalists groups.

http://www.ontarionature.org/discover/member_groups/conservation_directory.php